

F
352
.L38



THE BURSTING
OF
PIERRE MARGRY'S
LA SALLE BUBBLE.

By JOHN GILMARY SHEA.

Reprinted from the New York Freeman's Journal.

NEW YORK:
T. B. SIDEBOTHAM, PRINTER, 28 BEEKMAN STREET.

1879.

THE BURSTING
OF
PIERRE MARGRY'S
LA SALLE BUBBLE.

By JOHN GILMARY SHEA.



NEW YORK:
T. B. SIDEBOTHAM, PRINTER, 28 BEEKMAN STREET.

—
1879.

F352

L38

THE BURSTING OF PIERRE MARGRY'S LA SALLE BUBBLE.

For nearly twenty years Mr. Pierre Margry has been holding over the heads of American scholars, with a great show of mystery, documentary evidence which was to prove to a certainty that his fellow, Norman Robert Cavelier, commonly known as La Salle, was the first to discover the Mississippi, and that he had been deprived of his just glory in favor of Joliet, son of a blacksmith, American born at that, and Marquette, a Jesuit. His first claim was that La Salle descended the Ohio and Mississippi to its mouth in 1670. This proving untenable he claims that subsequent to that date he descended the Illinois and Mississippi.

Articles by him have appeared in French journals, a fellow Norman, Gravier, adopted his views, but in this country there was a lack of faith. Bancroft had Margry's published articles and some of the documents in which he relied, but did not accept his positions. Mr. Faillon, writing from documents strongly prepossessed against the Jesuits, could not embrace his views. Mr. Parkman, to whom he furnished many documents, and who shows constantly Margry's influence, and who had apparently all that Margry relied upon, dared not compromise his reputation by adopting his theories. HARRISSE, a bibliographer, dispassionately studying the question, found Margry's arguments most unsubstantial.

Yet, with the fact that not a single American student of history has ranged himself beside him, Mr. Margry, in a recent letter to Mr. Lyman C. Draper, says: "These articles of mine have greatly troubled certain persons, as appears by the meeting at Missilimakinak, regarding the discovery, more or less reliable, of the the remains of Father Marquette. What I said concerning Cavalier de la Salle's priority in discovering the Ohio and Mississippi, has been the occasion of great and even acrimonious controversies. I care nothing for attacks from which search after truth is excluded, and which are little else than passion." This is very silly. American historical students have simply given the verdict, "Not proven," as to Mr. Margry's theory.

But he has at last shown his hand and enabled us to see all that he has to bring forward on the subject. His exceptional advantages in being able to investigate year after year the French archives, making copies of many documents for the Canadian Government, Mr. Parkman and other scholars enabled him to collect a mass of material, that was supposed to be of great value. By some lobby influence at Washington, an appropriation, I believe of ten thousand dollars, was made to enable him to print them. Three volumes have appeared, and it must be avowed that they are sadly disappointing. They are padded out and extended unjustifiably, and the new matter proves to be comparatively little. The documents are divided into classes, and arranged under chapters, with an abundance of bastard titles and extended headings like those of a sensational newspaper. The source of the document is not given, except in a confused way at the end, nor information furnished whether from

the copy is made an original or a copy, whether late or early. The first document of all, the "Memoire of the Recollects," is no novelty here. It was printed in the Quebec *Abeille*, May 30, 1859, *et seq.*, with notes by the late accurate Abbé Ferland. The summary of discoveries, pp. 35 to 41, will be found translated in the "New York Colonial Documents," iii., p. 507; pp. 43-55 are extracts from the "Jesuit Relations," which have been reprinted entire in Canada. The notice on Allouez, pp. 57-72, I used more than twenty five years ago, and he introduces it, as he rather amusingly tells us, only to give him a pretext for inserting an anti-Jesuit polemical tract. The documents, pages 76, 77, 82-9, 91-4, 99-100, 167, 238, 245, 249, 250, 255, 257, 273, 281, 286, will be found in "New York Colonial Documents," ix., pp. 29, 41, 64, 67, 65, 66, 69, 72, 73, 75, 95, 93, 115, 120, 92, 121, 117, 123, 125, and it would be easy to extend the reference. The letters pp. 238, 9, 242 are in the "Mission du Canada," i., p. 343, etc. If the "Relation of Joliet's Discovery" is virtually a copy of that in his hand-writing preserved in the Seminary of St. Sulpice, Paris (Faillon, *Histoire* 3, p. 315; HARRISSE, p. 322-3), the suppression of Joliet's own letter on the same sheet needs explanation. It does not look honest; and the note of the editor on page 301, makes us think he has recently read "Tartuffe." The act of taking possession, page 96, has always been published in "Tailhan's Perrot," page 292. And in many cases he gives merely an extract where the "New York Documents" give the entire paper, enabling the student to see the connection and understand the tone of the whole.

The editing is very carelessly done. A letter given on page 239, as of Father Gravier, is evi-

dently of Father Julian Garnier, who was then in the Seneca country, while Gravier never was. On page 255 the extract from Frontenac's letter regarding Joliet, has the date suppressed in the text and given only in the summary, which in view of the fact that the animus of the whole collection is to assail Joliet, does not look accidental.

There are, undoubtedly, papers here made accessible to historical students for the first time, but their number and value are not what one would expect from a collector possessing for years the remarkable advantages of Mr. Margry. The most important are really those which give the true story of La Salle's last attempt, expose his piratical object and relieve Beaujeu from the odium so long, so disingenuously and so persistently heaped upon him.

In his letter to Mr. Draper, as translated by Mr. James D. Butler, Mr. Margry says: "I still very firmly believe that La Salle discovered the Mississippi by way of the Lakes, by Chicago and by the Illinois River, as far south as the 36th parallel and all this before 1673 (the date of Marquette's discovery). This opinion of mine I base first on the narrative made by La Salle to the Abbé Renaudot." This narrative describes an expedition in which La Salle was engaged southwest of Lake Ontario, for a distance of four hundred leagues, and down a river that must have been the Ohio. This was in 1669.

The narrative proceeds: "Some time thereafter he made a second expedition on the same river which he quitted below Lake Erie, made a portage of six or seven leagues to embark on that lake, traversed it toward the north, ascended the river out of which it flows, passed the Lake of Dirty Water

(St. Claire ?), entered the Freshwater Sea (Mer Douce), doubled the point of land that cuts the sea in two (Lakes Huron and Michigan), and descending from north to south, leaving on the West the Bay of the Puans (Green Bay), discovered a bay infinitely larger—at the bottom of which, towards the west, he found a very beautiful harbor (Chicago. Is there any earlier mention or description of that site?) and at the bottom of this river which runs from the east to the west, he followed this river and having arrived at about the 280th (sic.) degree of longitude and the 39th of latitude, he came to another river, which uniting with the first, flowed from the northwest to the southeast. This he followed as far as the 36th degree of latitude, where he found it advisable to stop, contenting himself with the almost certain hope of some day passing by way of the river even to the Gulf of Mexico. Having but a handful of followers, he dared not risk a further expedition in the course of which he was likely to meet with obstacles too great for his strength. (See the work above mentioned. Vol. i., p. 378.)

“I base my opinion, secondly, on a letter of La Salle’s niece—the Mississippi and the river Colbert being both one. This letter, dated 1756, says the writer, possessed maps which, in 1676, were possessed by La Salle, and which proved that he had already made two voyages of discovery. Among the places set down on these maps, the river Colbert, the place where La Salle had landed near the Mississippi, and the spot where he planted a cross and took possession of the country in the name of the King are mentioned. (Vol i., p. 379.)

“I base my opinion, thirdly, on a letter of Count

Frontenac. In this letter, which was written in 1677, to the French Premier, Colbert, Frontenac says that "the Jesuits having learned that M. de la Salle thought of asking (from the French crown) a grant of the Illinois Lake (Lake Michigan), had resolved to seek this grant themselves for Messrs. Joliet and Lebert, men wholly in their interest, and the first of whom they have so highly extolled beforehand, although he did not voyage until after the Sieur de la Salle, who himself will testify to you that the relation of the Sieur Joliet is in many things false." (Vol. i., p. 324.)

"In fine, I found my opinion on the total antagonism between the Jesuits and the merchants, as well as those who represented interest or only a legitimate ambition. In opposition to the Jesuits, the Cavalier de la Salle always associated with the Sulpicians or Recollects, whom Colbert had raised up against the Jesuits, in order to lessen the influence of those who would fain undermine him." ~

Here, then, is his case: To prove La Salle's discovery of the Mississippi prior to 1673, he relies on, first, a document of no date; second, a letter of 1756; third, a letter of Frontenac, in 1677; fourth, the antagonism between the Jesuits and the merchants. He relies on documents posterior to the date of Joliet and Marquette's voyage, and written when the results of that voyage were known, and on the fact that the Jesuits, as well as the Bishop and secular clergy, including the Sulpicians, were at issue with the merchants, condemning the sale of liquor to the Indians as sinful. This last argument I must dismiss, for I admit that my mind fails to comprehend how the existence of the liquor question in Canada, at that time, can prove that La Salle, who favored liquor, discovered

water, whether in the Mississippi, Lake Nyanza or the open Polar Sea, or by what rule of mathematics the exact date of his discovery can be deduced from the fact of there being a Liquor War.

To come to the documents. The first one, and that mainly relied upon by Mr. Margry, is one that he tells us he found in May, 1845, in a collection of papers all hostile to the Jesuits. Mr. Margry heads it, "Recit d'un Ami de l'Abbé de Galinée," and adds in a note, "And of the Abbé Arnauld. The name of this illustrious Jansenist, which will be found in the text, should naturally put us on our guard against the author of this document, the original of which is found in a collection of papers all hostile to the Jesuits. Several passages of this manuscript lead me to think that it is from the learned Abbé Renaudot, to whom Boileau addressed his 'Epistle on the Love of God.'" In his letter already quoted, it is ascribed positively to the Abbé Renaudot. Mr. Parkman, who had this document and analyzes it in his "Discovery of the Great West," says, page 101: "I am strongly inclined to think that this nobleman himself (Louis Armand de Bourbon, second Prince de Conti), is author of the Memoir." Here at once is a difference of opinion, and it ought to be easy to decide in 34 years whether the document is in the handwriting of the Prince de Conti or of the Abbé Renaudot. If it is a copy made by nobody knows who or when, of a document written by nobody knows who or when, its value certainly cannot be very great as evidence of acts of La Salle between 1669 and 1673, for this is the widest interval in which this pretended discovery of the Mississippi could have taken place.

Mr. Parkman says: "In one respect the paper

is of unquestionable historical value; for it gives us a vivid and not an exaggerated picture of the bitter strife of parties which then raged in Canada, and which was destined to tax to the utmost the vast energy and fortitude of La Salle. At times the Memoir is fully sustained by contemporary evidence; but often, again, it rests on its own unsupported authority," page 102. He might have added, "And is in direct contradiction to established facts." Elsewhere he says: "The writer himself had never been in America and was ignorant of its geography, hence blunders on his part might reasonably be expected. His statements, however, are in some measure intelligible," page 20. Mr. Parkman, using it as he does, and misled into treating a map made by Joliet himself, as one made prior to Joliet's voyage (See HARRISSE, notes page 197), candidly says: "That he (La Salle) discovered the Ohio may then be regarded as established. That he descended it to the Mississippi he does not pretend; nor is there reason to believe that he did so," page 23). "La Salle discovered the Ohio and in all probability the Illinois also; but that he discovered the Mississippi, has not been proved, nor in the light of the evidence we have, is it likely," page 25.

The estimate of Mr. Parkman, will be found, we think, by his own actual treatment of the document to be far too high. He really treats it as worthless.

In 1669, the French knew of a river called by the Iroquois, Ohio or Beautiful River, rising south of Lake Ontario and Lake Erie, and running westward. "The hope of beaver, but especially that of finding thereby a passage to the Gulf of California (Mer Vermeille), where Mr. de la Salle be

lieved that the river Ohio emptied, made him undertake this voyage, so as not to leave to another the honor of finding the way to the Pacific, and thereby to China," says the Abbé Galinée. He obtained letters patent from de Courcelles in 1669, and set out with two Sulpitians, the Rev. Dollier de Casson, priest, and de Galinée, deacon. They left Montreal in seven canoes, bearing 21 men, July 6, 1669. They reached Sonnontouan, a Seneca town, but failed to obtain a guide to the Ohio. The Jesuit Missionary, Fremin, had gone to Onondaga, and they had no one able to speak Seneca. They were told, however, that to the Ohio was a distance of six days' march of twelve leagues a day, while from Lake Erie they could reach it in three days.

Failing to obtain a guide they left the Seneca town, crossed the Niagara below the Falls, and on the 24th of September, reached Tinaoutaoua, an Iroquois town on the northern shore of Lake Ontario. Here they found Joliet coming from Lake Superior. He told them of the Pottawatamies at Green Bay, and their proximity to the Mississippi. Joliet gave them a written description of the route from the Ottawas, and apparently of a shorter one, which an Iroquois had explained to him, and Galinée embodied this information in a map. Joliet also told the Missionaries where he had left a canoe on Lake Erie. With this important aid from Joliet, Dollier de Casson and his party started for the West on the 30th, to take the route indicated by that explorer; La Salle, on the pretext of ill-health remained, showing an inclination to return to Montreal. ("Relation del' Abbé de la Galinée." Margry 1, pp. 112-147.)

This gives an authentic and circumstantial ac-

count of La Salle's first attempt to reach the Ohio; and by the testimony of Galinée, we find Joliet and La Salle face to face in this Indian village, Joliet already cognizant of the West, and explaining to La Salle and his companions his idea of the best mode of reaching the Mississippi, and offering them a description which he had drawn up of his route. In the question of the priority between La Salle and Joliet, all this is highly important.

Now, let us see how this matter is treated in Margry's first authority.

The Second Part of the Anonymous Memoir, headed "Histoire de M. de la Salle," begins thus :

"He left France at 21 or 22 years of age, sufficiently conversant with the last Relations of the New World, and with the design of attempting some new discoveries there. After having been some time in Canada, having acquired some knowledge of the languages, and traveled northward where he found nothing that induced him to remain, he resolved to turn southward, and having advanced for this purpose to an Indian town, where there was a Jesuit whose name has escaped me (I do not know whether it was not Father Albanel) and where he hoped to find guides, this Jesuit had notice of his coming and his design, went off to a distance, and although the Indians of that town, as almost all those of that continent, have of themselves no repugnance to serve as guides, he could never find a single one who would render him that service. He accordingly had to remain there some time, during which having persuaded those who accompanied him to try some fortune, hoping to find some Indians who would guide him, he went further, found what he sought and Mr. Galinee, who was with

him and who had gone to Canada only to catechise the Indians, thinking that he could render more service in the places where there were Jesuits, although he was moreover connected with the Sulpitians, resolved to go to the Ottawas, which is a northern nation, above the Fresh Water Sea, who carry on a great trade in beaver. This ecclesiastic had asked a Mission from the Bishop of Canada and that Bishop had sent him to the Jesuits to receive a Mission from them. Mr. Galinée, surprised at this dismissal, told him that he could not take his mission from the Jesuits, if merely because he was a licentiate of the Sorbonne, where he would never be pardoned for so extraordinary a step, but he could obtain nothing from the Bishop. He nevertheless set out, unable to persuade himself that these Fathers would at least prevent his baptizing, as he was a deacon. Accordingly with this hope he left Mr. de la Salle, who thought very differently from him, and who assured him that he would not be there long; and in fact the Jesuits thanked him and promptly bowed him out. Meanwhile Mr. de la Salle continued his way on a river which goes from east to west and passes to Onontagué (Onondaga), then to six or seven leagues below Lake Erie, and having reached the 280th or 83d degree of longitude and as far as the 41st degree of latitude, found a cataract which falls westward in a low marshy country, all covered with old stumps some of which are still standing. He was forced to land, and following a ridge which might lead him far, he found some Indians who told him that very far from there, this same river which lost itself in this low and vast country, united again in a single bed. He accordingly continued his way, but as the hardship was great, 23 or 24 men whom he had

conducted up to that point, all left him in one night, regained the river and escaped, some to New Netherland, the others to New England. He then beheld himself alone four hundred leagues from his home, to which nevertheless he succeeded in returning ascending the river, and living by hunting, on herbs and what the Indians gave him whom he met on the way.

Some time after that he made a second attempt on the same river, which he left below Lake Erie, making a portage of six or seven leagues to embark on that lake, which he crossed to the north, ascended the river which forms this lake, passed Salt Water Lake, entered the Fresh Water Sea, doubled the point of land which divides this lake in two, and descending it from north to south, leaving on the west the bay of the Puants, discovered a bay infinitely larger, at the head of which on the west he found a very fine harbor, and at the head of this harbor a river that runs from east to west. He followed this river and having reached about the 280th degree of longitude and 39th degree of latitude, found another river which, joining the former, flowed from northwest to southeast. He followed this river to the 36th degree of latitude where he found it advisable to stop, contenting himself with the almost certain hope of being one day able to pass, by following the course of this river, to the Gulf of Mexico, and not daring with the small party he had, to hazard an enterprise in the course of which he might find some obstacle insuperable to the means which he had."

This vague series of statements without a single date, or the name of a tribe, or a description of a landmark is quoted to us as historical authority! The first part is covered by Galinée's careful nar-

rative where every date is given, and the course marked so that it can be traced, and that narrative shows the falsity of this paper. La Salle and Dollier de Casson, each impelled by the information given by some Seneca ambassadors resolved to reach the Mississippi, the former to explore it to its mouth on the Pacific, believing the Ohio the main river running constantly westward; (see Dollier de Casson, *Voyage de M. de Courcelles*. Margry 1, p. 181; N. Y. Col. Doc., ix. p. 80). Dollier de Casson, a Sulpitian priest to found Missions on its banks. The *Histoire de M. de la Salle* suppresses Dollier de Casson, and invents a story about Galinée's being refused a Mission by the Bishop, and being sent to the Jesuits. The story is palpably false, as his own narrative shows. He went merely as assistant to Dollier de Casson, who received from Bishop Laval, faculties such as he had given the year before to Fénelon. Mr. Faillou describes them and refers to the Greffe de Villemarie, Archives Judiciaires, where they are, dated May 15th, 1669. Those of Fénelon to which he refers, are printed in Dollier de Casson's *History of Montreal*, issued by the Historical Society of that city, and were recently translated by me for "The First Pages of Cayuga History." Each party fitted out its own canoes, and neither seems to have provided an interpreter knowing any Iroquois dialect, so that on reaching the Seneca country they were helpless. Then they crossed the mouth of the Niagara, and proceeded to an Iroquois village on the Northern shore of Lake Ontario. If in doing this La Salle can be said "to have gone further and found what he sought," the *Histoire* is true, if not it is false; its statement of Galinée's Mission is false; the statement that he left La Salle when they parted at Te-

naoutaoua, because the Bishop would not give him faculties is false; that he went to the Jesuits who declined his services, is false, by Galinée's own showing.

The attempt to reach the Mississippi by the way of the Seneca country having failed, Dollier de Casson and Galinée acted on the advice of Joliet, who gave them information sufficient to draw a map, and they went to Sault Ste. Marie and the isles off Green Bay, evidently to follow the course by the Wisconsin which Joliet himself subsequently took. Galinée's narrative shows that Joliet was conversant with the subject, had studied the country, made no secret of the route he deemed best, and encouraged others to try it. And at this time we have no evidence of any knowledge of the Mississippi on the part of La Salle except of the most vague character.

The *Histoire* proceeds: "Meanwhile Mr. de la Salle continued his way on a river which goes from east to west, and passes to Onondaga, then to six or seven leagues below Lake Erie." The Sulpitians left him on the northern shore of Lake Ontario; this account transports him suddenly to a river rising east of Onondaga, passing by that and ~~and~~ then running westward within twenty miles of Lake Erie. In the *Memoire* attributed to La Salle himself, there is no such absurdity. He there (*Margry* 1, p. 330,) merely claims that he discovered the Ohio, and continues: "He followed it to a place where it falls from very high into vast marshes, at 37 degrees North, after having been swollen by another wide river that comes from the north." While the *Histoire* confusing everything says: "Having arrived at 280 degrees or 83 degrees of longitude, and to 41 degrees of longitude he found a cataract

which falls towards the west in a low marshy country all covered with old stumps," etc.

That La Salle really reached the Ohio is generally admitted ; but neither of these accounts enables us to fix the point to which he followed it. There is certainly no high fall. The rapids at Louisville cannot be so called, and the wide river from the north is wanting as well as the marshes through which an Indian canoe could not pass. To assume that he reached the Mississippi, and make it the wide river from the north flowing into the Ohio, makes the allusion to the high falls absurd, as there are certainly none on the Mississippi below the mouth of the Ohio. The *Histoire* so far from removing doubts, thicken them.

Its sequel, that he kept on his way by a ridge, till his 23 or 24 men deserted him, and made their way to New Netherland (New York), or New England, which must mean Virginia, does not look probable. Galinée says that La Salle proposed taking five canoes and fourteen men, and Dollier de Casson, three canoes and seven men, but that they really started with seven canoes, each with three men. After they parted company La Salle could not have had twenty-three or twenty-four men as his share of the twenty-one. While we admit La Salle's discovery of a river, it cannot be on this confused and distorted Memoir. We have in favor of it La Salle's, not very intelligible account, for neither the Ohio nor the Mississippi meets the case, a subsequent reference to the Ohio as a river he discovered, the recognition of La Salle's claim on Joliet's maps, and the passage in Talon's letter to the King, November 2, 1671, which we may justly refer to this exploration. The *Histoire* adds nothing to these.

The next statement in the *Histoire* is the one on which Mr. Margry relies to prove that La Salle discovered the Mississippi before Marquette and Joliet's voyage in 1673. Its statement is that some time after his discovery of the Ohio, that is an indefinite time after an unsettled date, La Salle made a second attempt on the same river, and leaving it, reached Lake Erie by a portage of six or seven leagues, taking the route which Galinée says the Senecas recommended, that of the Muskingam, and Cuyahoga, or Scioto and Sandusky, or that referred to later by La Salle, the Maumee and Wabash. That he then crossed Lake Erie, ascended the St. Clair, entered Lake Michigan, and at the head of the lake found a fine harbor, which seems to correspond to Chicago, and to give the narrative the widest interpretation, from this place reached a river running west, the Illinois, which he followed to the Mississippi, and descended that river to latitude 39 degrees North, longitude 280 degrees West, where another river, the Missouri, came from the northwest, and passing its mouth he kept on to 36 degrees North.

As this pretended discovery is mentioned on no document of the time, it rests solely on this *Recit* and *Histoire*; and the credibility of this paper must be tested. Its very form is against it; it is without name or date, but evidently more recent than 1678, when Joliet's voyage was known. As to La Salle's voyage it gives no dates or details as to the number of his men, the name of a single one who accompanied him, persons met at any point of the route, the time occupied on the voyage. There is nothing that could not have been derived from Joliet's account of the Mississippi. In itself the *Recit* and *Histoire* is utterly worthless as histori-

cal evidence. It abounds in statements easily refuted, and so preposterous that Mr. Parkman and Margry have hitherto consigned them to oblivion, Mr. Parkman showing his contempt of them, by never alluding to them in his "Jesuits of North America" or "Discovery of the Great West." Thus it charges that the Jesuits at Mackinac and Sault Ste. Marie had soldiers whom they drilled in the use of weapons; and though we have Galinée's, La Salle's, Hennepin's, and even La Hontan's accounts of visits to Mackinac, not one, though all unfriendly to the Jesuits, even hints at such a state of things, nor does Frontenac ever charge this in the despatches where he gathers all he can against them.

More vile than this is the charge that Brebeuf, Daniel and the other Jesuits killed on the Huron Mission died fighting; and that Father Garnier shot down three men before he fell. It would be necessary simply to read this precious document of Margry's, and Garnier's letters to decide which was the honest man. The charge that Brother le Boeme killed two Sioux at Sault Ste. Marie, that Bishop Laval kept an open shop in his house, are a sample of the style of the whole paper.

It professes to be made from conversations with La Salle, notes being taken after each interview, yet it is filled with professed inability to recollect names, and shows that the writer had access to despatches of Frontenac from which some of the matter is drawn, as, for instance, Hennepin's visit to Father Bruyas, whose name in his usual style this author professes to forget. As a sample of his honesty take this: "The Jesuits had sent to France, more than a year ago, one of their Donné Brothers, named Joliet, with another map made from hearsay, and this Donné Brother took to himself the honor

of this discovery. This imposture did not succeed to the honor of this Donné Brother, who according to all appearances did not meet the questions usually made on such occasions, and Mr. Galinée gave one of my friends to understand that he knew no one but Mr. de la Salle capable of having made that discovery."

Are we to take this as history? To make Joliet a Donné, one of those humble workmen who from zeal gave their services at the Missions; to say that Joliet who, as Galinée tells us, gave La Salle and Dollier de Casson a description of the route to the West, and told them the most practicable route to the Mississippi, made his map of the river from hearsay; to call his claim an imposture when Frontenac announces his mission by authority, and when the Government subsequently rewarded him for it, is worse than a crime; it is a blunder. Marquette and Joliet with only five men faced dangers from which Dollier de Casson and Galinée with better equipment recoiled; they carried out the exploration with fewer men than La Salle had in his ineffectual attempt to reach the Ohio; far fewer than the force with which he finally reached the exaggerated rapids at Louisville, the only falls his advocates can find.

This paper Mr. Margry did wisely to keep back for thirty years, and the United States Government would have done wisely to keep it thirty years before printing it as history. We may almost expect to see Baron Munchausen issue from the Government printing office.

To seek to establish any historical fact on the mere authority of this miserable anonymous libel is ridiculous. But it may be said that Mr. Margry has a document to support it. Let us examine it. This other document, relied upon by Mr. Margry,

is a letter of Magdalen Cavelier, Dame Leforestier, a niece of La Salle's, written more than eighty years after the period of the discovery of the Mississippi. It shows her to be very ignorant. Almost every word is misspelt. It runs thus :

“This 21 January 1756.

“As soon, sir, your letter received, I sought a safe way to send you the papers of Mr. de la Salle. There are maps which I have joined to these papers, which ought to serve to prove that in 1675 Mr. de la Salle had already made two voyages in these discoveries, since there is a map which I send you, by which mention is made of the place where Mr. de la Salle landed near the river Misipi, another place that he calls River Cobrer, in another he takes possession of this country in the name of the king and plants a cross, another place that he calls Frontenac, the river Saint Lorans at another place. You will see in these pieces the review made in the fort, which he built of stone, which was of wood. You will find the receipt of Mr. Duchesneau for intendant of 9000 liv. which Mr. de la Salle had paid him to indemnify those who had made this fort of wood.”

Now what is there in this? Simply that he had made two voyages of exploration by 1675, fixing, as it were, 1675 as the date of his visit to the Mississippi, and yet the whole tenor makes it clear that the map was made subsequent to his voyage to the mouth, and his planting a cross there, taking possession in the king's name. Certainly there is nothing here to prove that he visited the Mississippi before Joliet. The use of the name Colbert, which was given by Joliet, is evidence that the map was later than his discoveries. But the letter is too vague to amount to anything. The lady was a par-

ty to a suit many years before, and the papers in her hands must have all been canvassed then. No trace of such a claim appears at that time.

It may be said that the remark of Talon, in 1671, refers really to La Salle's expedition, in which he discovered the Mississippi, and that the Ohio discovery took place before and immediately after parting with Dollier de Casson. This theory cannot stand for a moment. Talon, writing by the vessels that sailed in November, 1671, announces that La Salle had not yet returned from his explorations. We are then to believe that La Salle returned from the West and announced to Talon in December, 1671, or early in 1672, that he had reached the great river of the West, and descended it to 36 degrees North; and that Talon either disbelieved the whole story and treated it as a fiction, or else forgot it as soon as he heard it. Certainly, by the time the summer of 1672 came, Talon was not influenced by La Salle's report, if there was any report, or he would not have despatched Joliet to the West to try and discover the very river that La Salle had just explored. As Talon has a reputation of being something better than an idiot, we must hold that when he sent Joliet to discover and explore the Mississippi, he had no intelligence of its discovery and exploration by any one else.

Had he known of La Salle's discovery and treated it as an imposture, La Salle, on going to France, in 1674, would undoubtedly have protested against the wrong done him, and in working against Joliet's Illinois project, in 1677, would have used his claim of prior discovery. Even at a later date, when he made the voyage down, which is so fully chronicled, he merely criticized Joliet's account, admitting his voyage, without pretending to have anticipated him.

Indeed, he admits Joliet's priority: "It is true that the Sieur Joliet, to anticipate him, made a voyage, in 1673, to the River Colbert," says La Salle, himself. (Margry, 2, p. 285.)

Moreover, we have La Salle's own evidence, in regard to this Chicago route. In his letter of September 29, 1680 (Margry, 2, p. 79), he claims the discovery of the Ohio, and extols its superiority over the Wisconsin, "the route by which Joliet passed." On p. 95, he decries the Chicago route, as if it had been extolled by others; and on p. 167, explicitly says that it was recommended by Joliet, and on p. 137, he states that the name Divine was given to the river by Joliet.

Now, is it possible that he could have taken this route to the Mississippi prior to the voyage of Marquette and Joliet, and consequently before Joliet ever saw this Chicago river, and yet never allude to the fact, but on two occasions associate Joliet with it as discoverer, namer and recommender. Would he not have asserted his own claim, and not fallen back, as he habitually does, on his discovery of the Ohio?

It seems strange that La Salle, without having explored the Mississippi, could have gone to France and obtained a grant when Joliet, the real discoverer, met a refusal. But it is not stranger than to see our Government, without any examination, give money to Mr. Margry to print papers already accessible, or not worth printing, when papers of the highest interest to our country lie unprinted here. However, it is almost impossible to fix a time when La Salle could have gone to the Mississippi before his voyage to France, in the autumn fleet of 1674.

That he had not made the discovery up to November 2, 1671, seems certain from Talon's dis-

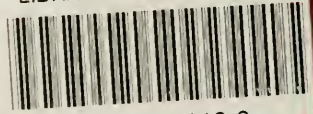
30470
373
14732
81

patch. That, after his return from Ohio, he started westward, and forestalled Marquette and Joliet, or went while they were actually on the river, it is impossible to believe. There would have been some notice somewhere of the rival attempts. In the summer of 1673, he was Frontenac's messenger to the Iroquois cantons; at Easter, in 1674, he was creating a disturbance in the church at Montreal; in November he went to France.

La Salle's prior discovery of the Mississippi is a bubble, which Mr. Margry, by giving in articles merely fragments of documents, has ingeniously blown to an immense size. It staggered many who thought that there must be something in it. Clear heads like HARRISSE, TAILHAN, FAILLOÛ, examined his arguments carefully, so far as they had the documents, and decided that he failed to prove his case. Mr. Parkman, more guardedly, reaches the same result. Now that we have all that he relies on, the bubble bursts and vanishes into thin air; it is merely a monstrous hoax that he has been playing.

Carlson

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS



0 014 542 119 6